

Time, Skills, Money....

Make Your Disaster Donations Count

The Missouri May tornadoes destroyed lives and property. On the plus side, Missourians volunteered their time, their skills and money to help disaster victims begin recovery process in the days, weeks and months after the tornadoes. Missouri SEMA's Statewide Volunteer Coordinator Dante Gliniecki offers the following seven tips to make your donations count.

1. Work and Volunteer with a Recognized Disaster Volunteer Organization. These volunteer organizations are often on scene shortly after a disaster. Their disaster relief skills may range from needs assessment, clean-up, mass feeding, sheltering, first aid, crisis counseling, pastoral care and child care. These same volunteer organizations remain active long after the state and federal responders leave the disaster. They may help with home repairs, family casework or "unmet needs." A list of Missouri Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster is available on the Missouri SEMA homepage: www.sema.dps.mo.gov then click on link to the Missouri Disaster Partnership in the blue side bar. There are several documents that give useful information about different organizations, their skills and contacts.

Volunteering Your Time and Skills. Check out local volunteer organizations to see if your skills match their goals. Take advantage of training. Recognized organizations may offer insurance and liability protection for their trained volunteers. **Be patient and be flexible!** Spontaneous volunteers are hard to manage and become frustrated if they feel they wasting their time. Your unique skills might be critical later in a disaster response. Food, shelter and first aid may be an immediate priority. Chain saw and debris removal will definitely be needed. Childcare, help filling out forms or crisis counseling may be ongoing needs. Cleanup, and/or rebuilding talents are critical. Remember the response maybe immediate, but the recovery maybe ongoing.

2. Financial Contributions Are Best. Cash donations to volunteer agencies will help stimulate the local economy for the disaster community. The recovery process begins quicker and items can be distributed faster. Cash donations help meet citizen's most pressing needs with vouchers or targeted goods. Cash donations are tax deductible.

To Donate and What To Donate, That Is The Question!

Remember unsolicited donated goods must be collected, sorted, labeled, packed, transported, unloaded, resorted, relabeled and redistributed. This takes volunteers away from working with victims one-on-one.

3. Donate through an Organization. Experienced organizations base their disaster relief activities on overall disaster and detailed needs assessments. If an organization is interested in donations, they will have an infrastructure in place to store and distribute the goods. Coordinate with the organization to make sure the right goods and the right amounts are collected. It is often better to collect one or two needed items rather than a large of mixed bag of unmarked items thrown into a box.

4. Confirm the Need BEFORE Collecting items. Call toll-free telephone numbers to determine what items, or skills are needed for the disaster response. Do not be upset if your call is not put at the top of the list. The items you wish to donate or your skills may be essential in the disaster recovery stages. Provide a contact telephone number and dates you are available to volunteer. Be patient!

5. Donated Items must be Packed and Labeled. After confirming the need for specific goods. The goods must be properly sorted, packaged and labeled. Specific contents should be packed together with a content list taped to the side of the box. This allows receiving officials to determine what is inside the box without opening it. It also allows officials to get the box to the proper distribution points faster.

6. Transportation Must Be Planned. Make sure the transportation, warehousing, and staging areas are discussed before you send goods. Without advanced planning, donors may not have a way to get the goods to a specific distribution site. Do not assume unsolicited relief items will be transported at no charge. Do not assume the receiving organization will pay the transportation costs. If your group is collecting items, make sure you have the money to pay for transportation costs.

7. Used clothing is rarely useful. Used clothing is hard to clean, sort, pack, transport, store and distribute at a disaster. Mounds of used clothing take up valuable warehouse space and frequently end up being thrown away.